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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 000588

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MEPI TO JACQUELYN JOHNSTONE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/05/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KMPI](#) [KMCA](#) [YM](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND NEW M/INFO DISCUSS NEW PRESS LAW

Classified By: CDA Nabeel Khoury for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. Summary: During Ambassador's February 22 introductory call on new Minister of Information (M/INFO), Hassan al-Lawzi, discussions centered around the proposed media law. The M/INFO noted that the proposed press law bill, as written, was designed to guarantee freedom of information and confided that he hoped for an independent broadcast media in the near future. End Summary.

¶12. (C) On February 22, Ambassador paid an introductory call to the new M/INFO, Hassan al-Lawzi. The bulk of the meeting was spent discussing the proposed new press law that is currently under review with the Consultative (Shura) Council. Lawzi declared that the ROYG wanted to balance guaranteeing freedom of information, press and political participation against the right to a free press.

¶13. (C) Addressing the Ambassador's concerns that the bill is designed to protect the ROYG from journalists and not the other way around, the Minister retorted that the proposed law's goal was to remove speech-based cases from a criminal to a civil forum. "We must also protect all individuals from personal slander," noted Lawzi, referring to Ambassador's observation that public figures in U.S. law are afforded less protection for libel. Lawzi promised a fully transparent bill passage process that would include the Yemeni Journalist Syndicate (YJS), whom he described as his "friends."

¶14. (C) On broadcast media, Lawzi commented that despite the ROYG's past fears, it had to eventually allow independent broadcast media to operate in the country. He added that it was his personal hope that this would happen soon, although he did not identify a time frame. (Note: There is currently no independent broadcast media in Yemen).

¶15. (C) The meeting concluded with Lawzi noting that his newly appointed ministry cherished its relationship with the USG and that he looked forward to expanding relations with the U.S. in the very new future.

¶16. (C) Comment: A minister once before, Lawzi seemed comfortable in his new position. The Minister was frank, spoke to the point and did not surround himself with several aides at his beck and call. Although it is still too early to assess whether or not Lawzi was sincere in his promises -- or whether he will be given enough free reign to implement them -- Lawzi already made good on one promise by meeting with the YJS on March 5. End Comment.

Khoury